

Comparison: French and American Revolutions and their Legacies

AP World History
West Hills High School

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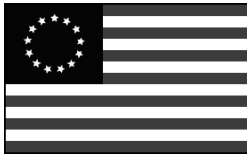
Basic Differences



- French Revolution wanted to change everything - Government, Social Structure, Economy, Religion
- American Revolution sought a change in government, but the social system remained intact

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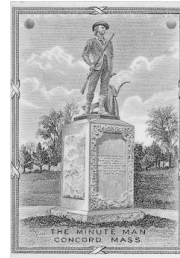
American Revolution



- Most colonists wished to remain members of the British Empire
- Violation of "Rights of Englishmen"
- A "war for independence" or a revolution?

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American Revolution



- The British upper class was simply replaced by a new American upper class
- Lives of others (women, Native Americans, commoners, slaves) changed little.
- Legacy of American Revolution: created revolutionary constitution that would evolve into its modern form

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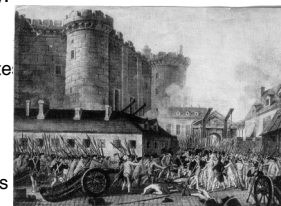
French Revolution Causes

- Political – no representation, King Louis XVI weak, inefficient government
- Economic – Inequitable taxation, economic crisis
- Religious – Church power corrupt
- Social – Urban poor, feudalism, rising middle class
- Intellectual – Enlightenment ideas attacked power of King, Church

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Course of the French Revolution

- Phase 1 (Moderate): National Assembly (1789–91)
 - Meeting of the Estate General
 - Tennis Court Oath
 - Storming of the Bastille
 - Declaration of Rights of Man
 - Constitution of 1791



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Course

- Phase 2 (Radical): National Assembly (1792–1794)
 - War with Austria, Prussia, and Britain
 - Second Revolution
 - Reign of Terror



Course of the French Revolution

- Phase 3: The Directory (1795–99)
 - Directory Established
 - Military success
- Napoleon Takes Control
 - Military genius, conquers much of Europe
 - Makes peace within France
 - Finally defeated at Waterloo



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French Revolution Achievements

- Ends Feudalism
- Brings people into politics
- Begins to secularize Europe
- Emphasis on tradition lessens – change important to the future
- Growth of nationalism comes from French idea of “Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity”
- Enlightenment idea that everything works rationally takes hold

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Problems with the French Revolution

- No stable government established
- Execution of the King; then Reign of Terror
- After Reign of Terror, people desperate for stability and support Napoleon



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Post-Napoleonic Order

- Congress of Vienna, 1815
- Restore balance of power
- Prevent further revolutions
- Restore legitimate rulers
- Austria, Prussia, Russia, and France crack down on nationalist and liberal movements

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Latin America

- In Haiti a true revolution occurs
- Other than Haiti, Latin American independence a conservative reaction to liberalism – Creoles afraid of sharing power
- Emerging countries undemocratic
- Spain prevented by Britain to regain colonies

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French Revolution Legacy

- Completely breaks fully established, traditional political and social systems
- Common people from the lower and middle classes want to be part of the political system
- Course of European history changes, sets the stage for democratic development and other revolutions (i.e. Russian Revolution)

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French Revolution Legacy

- People want complete social and political change, a break from the oppressive absolute monarchs of the time
- Conservatism vs. Liberalism
- A new sense of nationalism is born – people are dedicated to the greatness of the nation in a way not really seen before

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Question

- Which revolution do you consider more revolutionary? Why?

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